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ABSTRACT

The United States is experiencing a major demographic transformation. Some studies have projected that by the year 2020, whites will be in the minority as their number is surpassed by those of Indian, Asian, African, and Spanish descent, to name a few. Educators must make a major commitment to see that all students have the opportunity to perform academically at a high level. There will be barriers of color, language, culture, and attitude that will be greater than any faced before as white and minority students are joined by those from Thailand, Vietnam, and other countries. The task will be not to lower the standards but to increase the effort. To make this effort will be to the direct benefit of all, as a new generation of people become a part of the fabric of U.S. life, adding the high level of energy and creativity characteristic of groups making their way in the United States. Their numbers are now so large that if they do not succeed, all in the United States will have diminished futures. Few businesses are prepared to face this increasing cultural diversity. Managers must learn to value workforce diversity and manage in a way designed to seize the benefits that differences bring. (JB)

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The Emerging Minority Majority

by

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March, 1989

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"The Emerging Minority Majority"

The United States is experiencing a major, if not radical demographic transformation. Some studies have projected that by the year 2020, white Americans will be in the minority, as their number is surpassed by Americans of Indian, Asian, African, and Spanish descent, to name a few (Foster, et al., 1988).

By the year 2020, most of the Baby Boom will be retired, its retirement income provided by the much smaller groups that follow it. By 1992, only three workers will provide the funds for each retiree and one of the three workers will be minority.

For the next fifteen years at least, we will have to work harder with the limited number of young people we have to work with, whether we are in higher education, business or the military (Hodgkinson).

As Harold Hodgkinson summarizes the education consequences of demographic changes, the following points are especially significant to this discussion:

- A continuing decline in the level of retention to high school graduation in virtually all states, except for minorities.

- A continued drop in the number of minority high school graduates who apply for college.

- A continued drop in the number of high school graduates, concentrated most heavily in the Northeast.

- A continuing increase in the number of Black middle class students in the entire system.

- Increased numbers of Asian-American students, but with more from Indonesia, and with increasing language difficulties.

- Continuing high drop-outs among Hispanics, currently about 40% of whom complete high school.

- A decline in the number of college graduates who pursue graduate studies in arts and sciences.

- A major increase in part-time college students, and a decline of about one million in full-time students. (Of our 12 million students, only about two million are full-time, in-residence, and 18-22 years of age).

- A major increase in the number of college students who need BOTH financial and academic assistance. A great

liaison between the offices of student financial aid and counseling will be essential.

- Continued increases in graduate enrollments in business, increased undergraduate enrollments in arts and sciences courses but not majors.

- Increasing numbers of talented minority youth choosing the military as their educational route, both due to cost and direct access to "high technology."

The Bottomline:

The rapid increase in minorities among the youth population is here to stay. We need to make a major commitment, as educators, to see that all our students in higher education have the opportunity to perform academically at a high level. There will be barriers of color, language, culture, attitude that will be greater than any we have faced before, as Spanish-speaking students are joined by those from Thailand and Vietnam. The task will be not to lower the standards but to increase the effort. To do so will be to the direct benefit of all Americans, as a new generation of people become a part of our fabric, adding the high level of energy and creativity that has always been characteristic of groups who are making their way in America. Their numbers are now so large that if they do not succeed, all

of us will have diminished futures. That is the new reality (Hodgkinson).

Hodgkinson further reports that there is some very good news also -- there is today a solid and relatively well-established Black middle class family structure in the U.S.

It is easy to be comforted by the data on increased access for minorities to good jobs, to political leadership, and to owning their own businesses. However, it is equally clear that what is coming toward the educational system is a group of children who will be poorer, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, and who have more handicaps that will affect their learning. Most important, by around the year 2000, America will be a nation in which one of every THREE of us will be non-white. And minorities will cover a broader socioeconomic range than ever before, making simplistic treatment of their needs even less useful.

Increasing cultural diversity is a new reality in the American workforce, yet few employers or managers are prepared to fact it. Organizations that want the most productive employees will have to put aside old definitions of "corporate fit" and employ people of different colors and cultures.

But simply throwing different people together does not create a productive work environment -- or even a genuinely diverse one. People tend to cluster with people like themselves,

those with whom they feel comfortable and who confirm old stereotypes.

Managing diversity is conceptually different from equal employment opportunity, which was primarily a battle against racism and prejudice. To value workforce diversity is to manage in a way designed to seize the benefits that differences bring.

Many EEO and human resource department professionals seem to agree that four major problem areas need attention:

1) stereotypes and their associated assumptions,
2) actual cultural differences,
3) the exclusivity of the "white male club" and its associated access to important information and relationships, and
4) unwritten rules and double standards for success, which are often unknown to women and minorities (Copeland, 1988)

American businesses that fail to employ and develop people representatives of diverse communities and countries are, in effect, choosing to restrict severely their client and customer base.

It is one thing for a select group of executives or board members to develop awareness and insight into diversity. It is

quite another for that insight to become a part of an organization's culture.

The research of Bailey Jackson and Evangelina Holvino resulted in a model of the developmental stages from a monocultural to multicultural organization. Following are the stages:

- Monocultural. This first level is characterized by either implicit or explicit exclusion of racial minorities, women, and other socially oppressed groups.

- Nondiscriminatory. The second level is characterized by a sincere desire to eliminate the majority group's unfair advantage.

- Multicultural. This level describes the organization that is either in the process of becoming or has become diverse in the most visionary sense of the term (Foster, et al., 1988).

The increasing diversity of a company's client and employee base is not only played out through organizational change, it can be monitored by the attitudinal and identity shifts experienced by key actors in the scenario.

The research of Jackson, Hardiman, Cross and Jackson has pointed to five generic stages of development that individuals experience in grappling with their social group membership. They are the following:

- Naive/no social consciousness.
- Acceptance of social role assigned to his/her group.
- Resistance to definition based on prevailing racist and sexist notions about social groups.
- Redefinition of him or herself in ways that transcend the negative stereotypes of the past.
- Building bridges between themselves and the persons and organizations around them.

Successful organizations will react to diversity as the important business issue it is by implementing proactive, strategic human resource planning.

Developing a human resource management strategy that incorporates an emphasis on managing diversity has implications for a company's culture and organizational structure, as well as for the individual identities of key players. The emerging debate on American business competitiveness will be a constructive one if diversity management becomes a focal point rather than a peripheral issue (Foster, et al., 1988).

Four essentials in managing a diverse workforce are really a matter of changing old habits:

- Periodically stop and ask, "What's going on here? What assumptions am I making?"
- Make sure all your employees are invited into the club.
- Share the unwritten rules and change them to nurture diversity.
- Be sensitive to individual differences: appreciate diversity (Copeland, 1988).

To bring these points even more closely home, let us hear one man's testimony about being "the other."

My ancestors' presence in what is now the United States antedates Plymouth Rock, even without taking into account any American Indian heritage I might have.

I am, however, very clear the other, if only your everyday, garden-variety, domestic other. I've always known that I was the other, even before I knew the vocabulary or understood the significance of being the other.

Despite the operating myth of the day, school did not erase my otherness. It did try to deny it, and in doing so only accentuated it.

Being the other means feeling different; is awareness of being distinct; is consciousness of being dissimilar.

Being the other involves a contradictory phenomenon. On the one hand being the other frequently means being invisible. On the other hand, being the other sometimes involves sticking out like a sore thumb. What is he/she doing here?

If one is the other, one will inevitably be perceived unidimensionally; will be seen stereotypically; will be defined and delimited by mental sets that may not bear much relation to existing realities. There is a darker side to otherness as well. The other disturbs, disquiets, discomforts. It provokes distrust and suspicion. The other makes people feel anxious, nervous, apprehensive, even fearful. The other frightens, scares.

For some of us being the other is only annoying; for others it is debilitating; for still others is is damming.

Arturo Madrid also writes that over the past three decades, the "dejure" and "defacto" segregations that have historically characterized American institutions have been under assault.

Despite the lip service given to the goal of the integration of minorities into institutional life, what has occurred instead is ghettorization, marginalization, isolation.

One of the strengths of our society -- perhaps its main strength -- has been a tradition of struggle against clubbishness, exclusivity, and restriction.

Today, more than ever, given the extraordinary changes that are taking place in our society, we need to take up that struggle again -- irritating, grating, troublesome, unfashionable, unpleasant as it is. As educated and educator members of this society, we have a special responsibility for leading the struggle against marginalization, exclusion, and alienation (Madrid, 1988).

If we do not pick up the gauntlet, it is highly unlikely that this country will be adequately prepared for this new phenomenon -- the emerging minority majority.

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